

TESTIMONY OF CATHERINE FERRY
CT ASSOCIATION OF CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING
MARCH 11, 2010
APPROPRIATIONS SUB-COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
GOVERNOR'S MARCH 1, 2010 DEFICIT MITIGATION PLAN

My name is Catherine Ferry, from Portland CT. I am the president of the CT Association of Centers for Independent Living (CACIL), and the executive director of The Disabilities Network of Eastern CT (DNEC), in Norwich.

Like others, yet again, I plead with you to stop the Governor's most recent Mitigation Plan, which would eliminate State funding for Centers for Independent Living. The proposal cuts \$110,000, which is our remaining funding for the current fiscal year.

As grassroots service providers, and more importantly, consumers ourselves with disabilities, we are seeing every day the cumulative, destructive effects of the recession and the State's fraying, and now proposed elimination, of the safety net for disabled, children, elderly and others who are poor. It is obvious that more people are in need, and that those who were already needy are slipping into family life-threatening situations. What was a crisis has become a chronic failure and broken promise.

I can, and will, explain to you how Centers for Independent Living save the State money, maximize federal grants and reimbursements, put persons with disabilities off entitlements and onto taxpaying payrolls. But we have said all of this before. We come every year to justify our meager State funding allocation.

In this terrible recession, the bigger, overall truth must be faced, no matter how politically unwise on the surface. The truth, (as shown by report after report,

newspaper article after article, editorial after editorial), is that CT residents who are the least able to pay – the poor and the middleclass- are paying the highest proportion of their income (12%) in State taxes. Those who are the richest, pay only 4.9% of their income (after federal offset).

Should not those CT Residents with the highest 1%, or even 5%, of income pay 12%, the same rate, as those who cannot afford to feed and house themselves and their families? This “radical” position, proposed by individuals like William Cibes, the former secretary of the State Office of Policy and Management, would solve the current budget crisis, and assure the continued, and improved flow of federal reimbursement into CT. The State would be able to continue mandated, reimbursable services which are proposed to be cut.

The issue goes far beyond the balance sheet. It is time to FIX this inequity. CT tends to tinker, study, amend, and slowly change its mores and laws. But we think of ourselves as enlightened and compassionate. We are just cautious.

However, this deficit is a new and desperate situation. Now is the time to fix an outdated and broken taxation system. Passing CT's income tax caused grumbling, but it solved a budget crisis AND began to equalize our taxing practices, by courageously changing an outdated way of doing the State's business.

We face such a time again. I believe the suffering and the potential for catastrophic failure of CT's traditional backbone- middle class families and small businesses is real. This is not California. We do not just no to people in need. With no one but the emergency rooms and State Medicaid to serve the needy, our way of life, and the responsible, caring service system we have developed over more than two hundred years will fail. The State, as a business, will grind to a halt.

This Legislature was elected, as were all of its predecessors, to preserve, protect, and further the betterment of all of the citizens of CT. I beg you, follow their precedents in difficult times. Rise to this challenge with vision and courage.

Yes, you will be criticized. Yes, re-election will be harder. But, just as implementing the State income tax, or codifying the sacrifices that were necessary for the greater good in the Depression and WWII, were challenging, we elected you to do the right thing, to be a symbol of CT's best. This is not the time to tinker, or to niggle away at programs and services.

You know that the Governor's Plan does not even work! All it does is further failure and suffering; the deficit is only hidden.

Do the right thing. Revamp the estate tax. Remove loopholes for the wealthy. If you must increase taxes, place them on expensive toys and "sins", (cigarettes, alcohol). Restore the mutual responsibility and respect that is our state's way. Let each one help the other, to their own degree of capability. Mutual effort supports us all and makes us one. This is the CT we all believe in.

Please, listen to my statement. My voice represents many citizens, Republicans, Democrats, middle class, poor, others. Do your jobs, take the broad, long term view. Make us proud of you and ourselves. Fix the tax structure, do not victimize those who are already suffering!

BACKGROUND:

The five Centers for Independent Living in CT are federally and state mandated, consumer controlled and run agencies, serving any and all persons with any disability. We provide essential services, information and referral, peer counseling, advocacy, independent living transition services, special education advocacy, vocational counseling and placement, housing referrals, assistive technology, and many other services in conjunction with, and in referral to, other local agencies. We are cost effective. We utilize, not duplicate, the existing service network. We help folks with disabilities learn how to help themselves. For example, my agency, DNEC, provides multiple specialized services to the large Deaf community in eastern CT, including ASL interpreter advocacy, video phone services, outreach, CAPTEL phones and other services to those who are hard of hearing, especially seniors. We teach an ASL class for the community. We offer various support services for parents of special needs

children. We run local advocacy and support groups. We help towns to assess their ADA building and publicity/ meeting compliance.

We are funded through a mix of federal and state matching funds, as well as grants, and private donations. The CILs federal funding is allocated to provide specific disability services; peer counseling, I&R, independent living skills training, individual advocacy and systems advocacy.

CILs need state funding to provide the on-going infrastructure (rent, utilities, computers, phones, administrative staff) to support our delivery of important state grant programs such as; Money Follows the Person (MFP), BRS/BESB job coaching, Ticket to Work, Connect-Ability, Tech Act assistive/ rehabilitation technology, CAPTEL telephones, and more. All of these grants are designed to reduce state Medicaid costs while increasing the independence, and, oftentimes, full participation and tax paying ability of CT citizens with disabilities.

While it is true that Federal ARRA funds available to DSS may be assigned to CILS, these are program dollars, not infrastructure. They are time limited and program driven.

The DSS budget line for Centers for Independent Living (CILs) was cut by \$251,000 (38%) in FY 2009/10, and the Governor again proposes to eliminate state funding to CILs in FY 2010/11. We have already been forced to layoff staff and scale back programs. My overworked staff have not had an increase in two years. Surely, this proposed cut is the proverbial pennywise and pound foolish analogy. CILs are such a small funding amount in big picture, yet we leverage and provide so many services, implement so many state programs at low cost, and save so many Medicaid dollars.

The Long Term Care Planning Council, the Commission on Aging and DSS recently gave a detailed presentation to you on the future of ADRCs for CT. Aging and Disability Resource Centers. This is a federal pilot model "One stop shopping" for entitlement assessment, referrals, housing, and long term care

services. I can tell you, that without state, federal, or pilot funding, DNEC already performs those functions in eastern CT. Working closely with our colleagues at Senior Resources, we are the “go to” source.

CILs are the best deal around for the price. We’ve been here for twenty years. We don’t need planning and start up time. We’re moving folks into the community and out of nursing homes. Sustain what you have, build on us. Don’t cut our necessary state base funding and replace it with reduced, time limited, strings attached, soft, squishy federal funding. Thank you.

